



Line management behaviour and stress

Updated guidance for line managers



Line management behaviour and stress at work: guidance for line managers

What is stress?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed upon them.

There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.

Why does stress need to be tackled?

- About one in six people say they find their work either very or extremely stressful.
- Work-related stress accounts for over a third of all new incidents of ill health.
- The 2007 CIPD Absence Management survey found stress to be the leading cause of long-term absence in non-manual workers.
- Each case of stress, anxiety or depression leads to an average of 30.2 working days lost.
- In 2006–07 a total of 13.8 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety.
- Forty per cent of organisations responding to the CIPD 2007 Absence Management survey reported an increase in stress-related absence in the previous 12 months.

What is already being done about stress at work?

In November 2004, the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published national Management Standards for work-related stress, which provide guidance on best practice for employers. The overall aim of these standards is to bring about a reduction in the number of employees who go off sick or who cannot perform well at work because of stress.

The Management Standards and supporting processes are designed to:

- help simplify risk assessments for stress
- encourage employers, employees and their representatives to work in partnership to address work-related stress throughout the organisation
- provide the yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.

Full details of the Management Standards can be found at: www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards

Why is stress management particularly important to me as a manager?

The Management Standards initiative is driven from health and safety; however, much of the responsibility for its implementation will fall on line managers. This means managers need to know what stress is; and also understand what skills, abilities and behaviours are necessary to implement the Management Standards and manage employees in a way that minimises work-related stress.

As a manager, you play an important intermediary role between individual staff members and the organisation. As a result, you can help determine how well your organisation manages stress in its employees.

More importantly, as a manager you have a huge impact on the work-related stress of your employees. In fact, the recent CIPD Absence Management survey found that respondents cited management style in the top three causes of work-related stress overall. For instance:

- You can prevent (or conversely cause) stress by the way that you behave towards your employees.
- Your influence may mean employees can be protected from, or exposed to, stressful working conditions, for instance negotiating an extension to a deadline in a team that is already working to full capacity.
- Working closely with your team, you are well positioned to identify stress in others at an early stage.
- If one of your employees suffers from stress, you, as their manager, are likely to be involved in the solution.
- Finally, increasingly managers are responsible for the uptake and roll-out of risk assessments for work stress within their team/department.

To be able to help you become the most effective 'stress manager', we need to understand exactly what behaviours are important in this context.

What do line managers need to do to prevent and reduce stress?

In 2007, the results of the first phase of a research project, jointly funded by the HSE and the CIPD, were published. This project aimed to clarify the specific behaviours required by managers to prevent and reduce stress in their employees effectively. Interviews were conducted with almost 400 managers and employees, and discussions held with over 50 HR professionals, to establish what management behaviours were relevant to the

effective and ineffective management of stress and well-being in staff. As a result of this a framework of 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' was produced, made up of 19 competencies, which provided behavioural indicators of what constitutes 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' management. This framework was published by the HSE (Research Report 553), and in related guidance leaflets (Managing Stress at Work: A competency framework for line managers, CIPD 2007).

To make the framework more manageable and user-friendly, a second phase of research was undertaken, aimed at both revising and refining the existing framework, and developing a 'Stress management competency indicator tool' (questionnaire) to allow managers to examine the degree to which they exhibit the 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' behaviours. An initial questionnaire was created from the data collected in phase 1 of the research. This was then used as an upward feedback measure in 22 organisations, involving 656 employees and 152 managers. The data was then statistically analysed, before being validated by 38 stress experts. The resulting revised 'Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work' framework is shown on the next two pages. The 'Stress management competency indicator tool' is available in the full research report (see back page for details) and an online version, for use as a self-assessment by line managers, is expected to be available on the HSE website in the autumn of 2008.

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: refined framework following phase 2 of the research

Competency	Sub-competency	Do (✓) Don't (x)	Examples of manager behaviour
Respectful and responsible: managing emotions and having integrity	Integrity	✓	• is a good role model • treats team members with respect • is honest
		x	• says one thing, then does something different • speaks about team members behind their backs
	Managing emotions	✓	• acts calmly in pressured situations • takes a consistent approach to managing
		x	• is unpredictable in mood • passes on stress to employees • panics about deadlines • takes suggestions for improvement as a personal criticism
	Considerate approach	✓	• makes short-term demands rather than allowing planning
		x	• creates unrealistic deadlines • gives more negative than positive feedback • relies on others to deal with problems • imposes 'my way is the only way' • shows a lack of consideration for work-life balance
Managing and communicating existing and future work	Proactive work management	✓	• clearly communicates employee job objectives • develops action plans • monitors team workload on an ongoing basis • encourages team to review how they organise work • stops additional work being taken on when necessary • works proactively • sees projects/tasks through to delivery • reviews processes to see if work can be improved • prioritises future workloads
		x	• is indecisive
	Problem-solving	✓	• deals rationally with problems • follows up problems on team's behalf • deals with problems as soon as they arise
		x	• is indecisive
	Participative/empowering	✓	• gives employees the right level of responsibility • correctly judges when to consult and when to make a decision • keeps employees informed of what is happening in the organisation • acts as a mentor • delegates work equally • helps team members develop in their role • encourages team participation • provides regular team meetings
		x	• gives too little direction to employees

Management competencies for preventing and reducing stress at work: refined framework following phase 2 of the research (continued)

Competency	Sub-competency	Do (✓) Don't (x)	Examples of manager behaviour
Reasoning/managing difficult situations	Managing conflict	✓	• acts as mediator in conflict situations • deals with squabbles before they become arguments • deals objectively with conflicts • deals with conflicts head on
		x	• acts to keep the peace rather than resolve issues
	Use of organisation resources	✓	• seeks advice from other managers when necessary • uses HR as a resource to help deal with problems • seeks help from occupational health when necessary
	Taking responsibility for resolving issues	✓	• follows up conflicts after resolution • supports employees through incidents of abuse • makes it clear they will take ultimate responsibility if things go wrong
		x	• doesn't address bullying
Managing the individual within the team	Personally accessible	✓	• speaks personally rather than uses email • provides regular opportunities to speak one to one • returns calls/emails promptly • is available to talk to when needed
	Sociable	✓	• brings in treats • socialises with the team • is willing to have a laugh at work
	Empathetic engagement	✓	• encourages employee input in discussions • listens when employees ask for help • makes an effort to find out what motivates employees at work • tries to see team member's point of view • takes an interest in team's life outside work • regularly asks 'how are you?' • treats all team members with equal importance
		x	• assumes rather than checks that employees are okay

What are the key messages I should take from this research?

1 Being an effective stress manager does not require extra work

We recognise that, as a manager, your workload and the pressures on you at work are already high and that finding the time to focus on stress management may be difficult. However, stress management doesn't have to be a separate activity; it is part of everyday management. It is about the way you behave on a day-to-day basis with those you manage.

2 There is not one key behaviour needed to be an effective stress manager

Our research suggests that effective stress management requires a complementary set of behaviours. These behaviours are likely to differ in importance depending on the situation and the individuals within your team.

3 Some of these behaviours may be things you already do, but some you may not

Reviewing the competency framework above and, if appropriate, using the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' (questionnaire) allows you to assess whether these behaviours are part of your repertoire or not (note: the questionnaire can be used as a self-assessment tool or you can use it to get upward feedback or 360-degree feedback). To make sure you manage in ways that prevent and reduce stress, if you identify any gaps in your skills or behaviours, you can seek targeted and specific help and guidance. Further research is being conducted in 2008 to explore how best to help managers show the relevant competencies/behaviours, with the aim of providing a toolkit of practical materials and guidance for managers and employers.

4 If you're involved in other stress management activities, such as risk assessments or stress auditing, both the above framework and the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' (questionnaire) can provide you with a useful starting point from which to approach a solution

For example, if the risk assessment identified that your team reported particular issues, you could use the framework to reflect upon your own behaviour, and the questionnaire as a means of self-assessment (or, if appropriate, of getting others' feedback) for clarity about how you might alter your behaviour to address the particular issues.

Checklist of information sources

As a manager you may find the following useful for gaining more information about stress at work:

- Health and Safety Executive website: for information about the Management Standards and, from autumn 2008, for the 'Stress management competency indicator tool' (questionnaire): www.hse.gov.uk/stress
- SHIFT Line Manager's Resource: for practical guidance on managing and supporting people with mental health problems in the workplace: www.shift.org.uk
- Mental Health Foundation and Mind websites: for information about mental health issues: www.mentalhealth.org.uk and www.mind.org.uk
- Don't forget that information and resources may be available through your employer, for example from: occupational health, employee assistance programme/welfare service, HR

The full scientific research report relating to this project can be downloaded from:
www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr633.htm

For further details about the research project so far or the final stage in the research process, please contact Rachel Lewis, Research Associate at Goldsmiths, University of London, on r.lewis@gold.ac.uk



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